

Message Text

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64

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-04 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-04 INR-05

LAB-01 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 DODE-00 PA-01 USIA-06

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R 161552Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY BERN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9711

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMCONSUL ZURICH

USMISSION GENEVA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE BERN 3882

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, SZ

SUBJECT: SWISS REFERENDUM ON FOREIGN WORKERS

REF: BERN A-216 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. IT STILL APPEARS LIKELY THAT IN THE OCT 20 REFERENDUM, INITIATIVE WHICH AIMS TO REDUCE BY ONE-HALF THE NUMBER OF FOREIGNERS IN SWITZERLAND WILL BE DEFEATED, PROBABLY BY FAIRLY SMALL MARGIN. ENTIRE SWISS ESTABLISHMENT IS LOBBYING AGAINST THE INITIATIVE, BUT AS VOTING DRAWS NEAR, GOVT, INDUSTRY AND UNIONS SHOWING INCREASED NERVOUSNESS ABOUT OUTCOME. VICTORY FOR INITIATIVE WOULD HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR SWISS ECONOMY, SOCIAL PEACE AND EVEN FOREIGN RELATIONS. IN ANY EVENT, PRESSURE TO REDUCE FOREIGN WORK FORCE LIKELY TO REMAIN VERY STRONG. END SUMMARY.

2. SWISS WILL VOTE OCT 20 IN NATIONAL REFERENDUM ON
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NATIONAL ACTION PARTY BACKED INITIATIVE FOR CONSTITUTIONAL

AMENDMENT WHICH WOULD HAVE CHIEF EFFECT OF CUTTING BY HALF
NUMBER OF FOREIGNERS RESIDENT IN SWITZERLAND WITHIN THREE
YEARS (DIPLOMATS AND CERTAIN OTHER CATEGORIES ARE EXEMPT).
IF INITIATIVE IS APPROVED, SOME 540,000 FOREIGNERS WOULD
BE FORCED TO LEAVE COUNTRY, INCLUDING ABOUT 300,000
FOREIGN WORKERS.

3. INITIATIVE IS SUPPORTED ONLY BY SMALL ONE-ISSUE
NATIONAL ACTION PARTY, BUT IT APPEARS TO HAVE TOUCHED RE-
SPONSIVE CHORD. INITIATIVE'S APPEAL IS TO "LITTLE MAN"
WHO WANTS TO VENT HIS ANGER AND FRUSTRATION WITH ILLS IN
SWISS SOCIETY AND YEARS FOR SIMPLER, MORE PURELY "SWISS,"
PAST. ARRAYED AGAINST INITIATIVE IS FULL FORCE OF SWISS
ESTABLISHMENT INCLUDING NATIONAL AND MANY CANTONAL GOVTS,
INDUSTRY, TRADE UNIONS, MEDIA AND CHURCHES. THEY HAVE
LAUNCHED UNPRECEDENTEDLY MASSIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST INITIA-
TIVE, WARNING OF SHARP ECONOMIC DOWNTURN, HIGHER INFLATION
RATE, UNEMPLOYMENT FOR SWISS CITIZENS, THREAT TO SOCIAL
SECURITY SYSTEM, AS WELL AS BLACKENING OF SWISS REPUTA-
TION AS HUMANITARIAN, DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY. THEY HAVE
ALSO WARNED AGAINST POSSIBLE RETALIATION AGAINST SWISS
LIVING ABROAD.

4. LATEST PUBLIC OPINION POLLS TAKEN A MONTH AGO SHOW
COMFORTABLE LEAD FOR OPPONENTS OF INITIATIVE. HOWEVER,
ON THIS HIGHLY EMOTIONAL ISSUE, POLLS ARE NOT COMPLETELY
RELIABLE GUIDE. THERE IS CURRENTLY BROAD CONSENSUS THAT
INITIATIVE WILL BE DEFEATED, BUT INFORMED OPINION IS
HEDGING ITS BETS BY SAYING THAT MARGIN COULD BE VERY
SLIGHT. NERVOUSNESS THAT DEFEAT OF INITIATIVE IS NOT
ASSURED IS SPREADING. UNPRECEDENTED APPEAL BY PRESIDENT
BRUGGER, SPEAKING FOR FEDERAL COUNCIL, TO REJECT INITIA-
TIVE EVIDENCE THIS NERVOUSNESS. ON BALANCE EMBASSY BELIEVES
THAT SWISS WILL REALIZE THEIR OWN BEST INTERESTS
SERVED BY VOTING DOWN THE INITIATIVE.

5. IN ARGUING AGAINST EXTREMIST MEASURES PROPOSED UNDER
INITIATIVE, ITS OPPONENTS HAVE CONCEDED THERE IS CAUSE
FOR ALARM IN HIGH PROPORTION OF FOREIGNERS IN SWITZERLAND
AND THAT THERE IS NEED NOT ONLY TO STABILIZE BUT ALSO TO
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REDUCE THEIR NUMBERS. ACCORDINGLY, NO MATTER HOW
REFERENDUM COMES OUT, PRESSURE AGAINST ISSUING RESIDENCE
PERMITS FOR FOREIGNERS, INCLUDING AMERICANS, IS LIKELY
TO INCREASE.
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